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Classified By: PolCouns John Bauman. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. The Turkish state has long considered Turks resident in Germany as potential allies and maintains official and unofficial means of influencing the community. For many years, Turkey had at best been ambivalent and sometimes directly hostile to integration. Turkey's stance has changed, but Ankara still sends mixed signals to its citizens and former citizens in Germany. The German government hopes for a more pro-integration policy in the future. Pressure from younger Turkish Germans, community leaders who seek greater distance from Ankara, and the German government will slowly erode the Turkish role here. End Summary.

History: Bonn and Ankara's Common Agenda

12. (U) For several decades after Turkish migration as "guest workers" began in the 1960s, Bonn and Ankara had, broadly speaking, a common agenda with respect to Turks in Germany. Because neither saw Turks as immigrants to Germany, Bonn was happy to let the Turkish state maintain strong ties with Turks and to let the Turks live in what are now described as "parallel societies" where German cultural and political norms did not apply. Key official mechanisms for maintaining ties to Turkey have been Turkey's large diplomatic presence (13 Consulates and Consulates General) and Ditib, an association of Turkish mosques in Germany managed by Ankara's Directorate of Religious Affairs, Diyanet. Beyond the official sector, a wide range of Turkish print and electronic media, sometimes in Germany-based editions, are available to the community. These media focus heavily on Turkish news and issues specifically related to the Turkish community. Few give any coverage to general German news, reflecting the tastes of their readership. A recent study concluded that 90 percent of Turkish Germans follow Turkish domestic politics; only two percent were interested in German domestic politics. Other studies have documented Turkish German reliance on Turkish media for news.

13. (C) These ties, plus the bonds of kinship, prolonged Turks' sense of themselves as separate from the majority community in important political and cultural ways. In some cases, the efforts of Ankara-affiliated organizations to oppose integration were blatant. As late as 2003, for example, Ditib officially and vigorously opposed Islamic instruction in German in public schools (Christian religion classes are offered in all states).

Diverging Agendas

14. (U) Only toward the end of the 1990s did Germany, prompted by growing concern about the socio-economic weaknesses of the Turkish German community, and subsequently by the threat of

Islamism, begin seriously looking at how to bring the community into German society. Reftels and previous report in depth on steps the German government is now undertaking to remedy forty years of neglect.

¶15. (C) Though the German government is now strongly pursuing integration, the Turkish government's agenda has yet to find a clear direction. At the macro-political level, many contacts tell us, Turkey still wants to retain a hold on the loyalties of Turkish Germans, so as to use the community to promote its EU candidacy. Most notably, Ankara was reportedly behind the 2004 establishment of the "Union of European Turkish Democrats," an organization based in Cologne which draws on successful young Turkish Germans to promote a mildly Muslim program of integration, German-Turkish links, and Turkish EU membership. The group has attracted considerable German attention. Ali Aslan, an Interior Ministry official working on integration, told us of his positive impressions made during a visit to the group with Interior Minister Schaeuble. However, Kenan Kolat, head of the Association of Turkish Communities (and whom others also say is tied closely to Turkish officialdom) claimed that the UETD was a Turkish Army project and actively promotes Turkish

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community "dependency" on Turkey. Further evidence of Turkey's desire to maintain close relations with Turkish Germans came during Prime Minister Erdogan's recent visit to Hannover, during which he told local Turkish Germans to learn Turkish first and "then see about German." Erdogan also explicitly rejected assimilation into German society. Ankara favors changes in German legislation that it perceives as discriminatory and which also tend to undercut ties to Turkey, for instance Germany's rejection of dual citizenship and new proposals that would require intending immigrants to learn German before their arrival and raise the age for a new

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foreign spouse to enter the country to 18 or, perhaps, even ¶21.

¶16. (C) Many of our contacts believe that groups like UETD and the Association of Turkish Communities are at a minimum indirect means for Ankara to spread and promote its views among Turkish Germans. Feminist lawyer Seyran Ates is more critical than most. She has told us that she believes there is a Turkish nationalist agenda that is hostile to integration and suggests that German funding for such groups' "integration" and social programs serves this hidden agenda. These contacts also believe that Ankara also provides funding for such groups, although the Turkish Embassy denies this and Interior's Aslan doubts it. Rather, Aslan sees the groups as legitimately reflecting the views of their members and statements such as Erdogan's as reflecting a somewhat exaggerated sensitivity to any measures the community sees as discriminatory. Aslan points out that dual citizenship is supported across the board in the Turkish German community.

¶17. (U) The Turkish government also has a security interest in maintaining a strong presence in the Turkish community. Most of the estimated 600,000 Kurds in Germany are of Turkish origin, making up as much as a quarter of the Turkish population. Germany's Office for the Protection of the Constitution estimates that in 2006 the PKK (operating under the name "People's Congress of Kurdistan - Kongra Gel") had a "potential membership" (i.e., members plus active supporters) of 11,500.

-- Ditib's Evolution

¶18. (C) Ditib's evolution is a study in the complexities of Ankara's relationship to Turkish Germans. We have heard for several years that Ditib is moving in a more pro-integration direction, with different contacts advancing different theories. Some suggest that Ankara believes that Turkish Germans will be a more effective lobby on behalf of EU

membership and other Turkish interests if they become German citizens. Others have said that Ditib is under pressure from the rising generation of Turkish Germans to become more German and thus more relevant to their lives and needs. Michael Blume, an expert on the Turkish community working in the Baden-Wuerttemberg State Chancellery, points to the latter factor but adds that Turkish politics also play an important role. In his view, the AKP (Turkey's pro-Islam governing party) has a long-term goal of establishing a true separation of Islam and the state in Turkey. It is pursuing this very cautiously in Turkey, he says. In Germany, though, the AKP sees the chance to stage something like a trial-run by slowly separating Ditib from the Diyanet. Blume points out that more and more of Ditib's leadership comes from the Turkish German community, although its leader is still essentially appointed from Ankara.

¶9. (C) In our conversations with non-Diyanet Turkish Embassy officials, we have gotten little sense that they, who insist that Ditib is already a completely German organization, see or would support separation, and Ditib's new President, Sadi Arslan, passes out business cards which identify him (like his predecessor) as the Turkish Embassy's Counselor for Religious Affairs. Necla Kelek, a prominent critic of religious Islam, believes, in contrast to Blume, that the AKP is seeking only to Islamicize Ditib (and the Diyanet) as part of its pro-Islam agenda. Kenan Kolat, Chairman of the Association of Turkish Communities, also sees an AKP agenda and fears that Ditib, which he and Kelek both associate with a "secular" Islam, will be dominated by the more orthodox groups within Germany's new Muslim Coordination Council (KRM)(Ref B). Lawyer Ates disagrees, seeing an independent Ditib as the only way to give decisive influence to the laicist majority of Turkish Muslims. Embassy Ankara reports some official concern about Ditib's recent affiliation with the KRM, based however on a possible weakening of the distinctiveness of the Turkish identity in a German/European Islam. In addition to the AKP's alleged agenda, we understand that there was pressure from Turkish Germans in Ditib to join the KRM to ensure Ditib's role in German Muslims' religious structures.

Dilemma

¶10. (C) We hear from Blume, Aslan and others that the younger generation of Turkish Germans feel, in fact, neither Turkish nor German. Aslan, himself of Turkish ancestry, reports that many are caught in an antiquated "Turkish" cultural milieu while having no real connection to Turkey. Blume, whose wife is Turkish, tells us many young Turkish Germans feel shame that their leadership often speaks no or only bad German. Aslan, seconded by Ates, also reports that Ankara is increasingly concerned that Turkish cultural isolation in

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Europe is in fact hurting its prospects for EU membership. Nor can Turkey overcome the effects of time and distance and maintain the same kind of relationship to today's generation as it did to their fathers or grandfathers. So, Ankara is obliged to support integration at some level. On the other hand, finding a balance between integration and maintaining ties to the homeland will be very difficult. For example, if Turkish Germans increasingly shift to German as their first language, as Germany insists, the role of Turkish media will likely fall considerably. So, too, will the role of Turkish speaking imams and of Ditib officials who don't know the language. Likewise, keeping Ditib tied to the Diyanet risks a clash with Turkish Germans who increasingly expect the organization to reflect their needs and concerns. Blume believes that the latter trend will gradually oblige Turkey to accept Ditib's conversion to a truly local organization.

Subtle German Pressure

¶11. (C) The question of Turkey's role in the Turkish-German and German Muslim communities is of some concern to German officials. Guenther Piening, Berlin's Commissioner for Integration, has told us that he is particularly concerned that a Turkish agenda could come to dominate the KRM, partly because of the weight of the Turkish community but also because of the special veto granted to Ditib in the Council. However, there is also a positive role to Ditib's influence, much appreciated by German officialdom. Ditib, as an arm of the Turkish state, has promoted the moderate, "secular" Islam that it seems German leaders would like to see in Germany. Ditib has also promoted loyalty to the secular state and respect for the law, two virtues Germany would like to instill in its Muslims. Visiting the construction site for a new mosque, Munich Mayor Christian Ude was explicit: Ditib was a guarantee for secular society (laicism) and would fight radical tendencies in Islam. The Germans also face a dilemma: a less Turkish Ditib might be more representative of Turkish Germans, but also less secular (especially because secular Turks have shown no interest in joining Ditib). Interior's Aslan summed up German uncertainty regarding Turkey. He did not think the Turkish government was a major force in maintaining the acknowledged distinctiveness of Turkish Germans, but he also thought that Turkey could and should do more to promote integration. Toward that end, Aslan reported that the Interior Ministry is organizing, for Istanbul in October, a seminar and exhibit on Turkish life in Germany. Though he was unclear on the specifics, Aslan hoped this event would help change Turkish attitudes and policy toward Turkish Germans.

Upcoming Tests

¶12. (C) Education is likely to be the main arena where potential conflicts between Germany and Turkey could be clarified. All our German and Turkish German interlocutors stress the importance of developing German language skills to successful integration. However, PM Erdogan's statement, the sharp criticism of plans in Hesse to cancel Turkish language classes, ostensibly for budgetary reasons, and the rejection by the Turkish Embassy of the German-only policy (agreed by the parents and students) at a Berlin school highlight the potential for conflict. Greater conflict could arise if a German state moves to establish an Islamic theological faculty at a German University (an urgent need, according to Ates). Such a faculty would pose a challenge to the near monopoly on religious leadership Turkey now enjoys among Turks in Germany. Ditib is, however, open to working with German universities on the establishment of such a faculty, Turkish Embassy contacts tell us. The overwhelmingly positive reaction to German-language Islam classes (by teachers trained in Germany and using curricula developed jointly between states and local Muslim communities) suggests that Turkey could not win a battle over education in the long-term. The courses, according to Blume, have proved to be a key tool for integrating students and families into the wider school community, giving Muslim students equal status with their Christian counterparts and offering families a trustworthy and well-informed link (the teacher) to school administration. The reaction to pilot projects was so positive it forced Ditib to reverse its historic opposition to in-school, German-language Islam classes.

Comment

¶13. (C) The Turkish state's role among Turkish Germans is neither simple nor always coherent. Moreover, rivalries and differences among Turkish Germans ensure that views of that role are also complex and, at times, contradictory. It is

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clear though, that to some degree, Ankara's role does hinder the integration process. Ankara and Turkish Germans with a

nationalist bent seem to be seeking ways to define a minimal acceptable level of integration. Many others, however, seem to be willing to accept or even prefer greater distance from the homeland. Though the antipathy between religious and secular Turkish Germans hinders cooperation on integration, their openness to change, combined with pressure from the German state and the younger generation of Turkish Germans appears, from our perspective, likely to cause a slow but steady erosion of Turkish official influence here. End Comment.

¶13. This cable was coordinated with Embassy Ankara.
TIMKEN JR